



The Belinda Sue Fund®

for Ovarian Cancer Awareness & Research

YEAR-END NEWSLETTER

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December 2016

A Letter from the Chairman....

Dear Friends,

We have now concluded the fifth year since the inception of The Belinda Sue Fund for Ovarian Cancer Awareness and Research, Inc. and we could not be more pleased with our progress to date! Your continued generosity, contributing to our cause, is so inspirational to us and those we serve. Thanks to you we achieved a milestone, and one of our primary goals of seeding an early detection grant, **The Belinda Sue Fund / Mary-Jane Welker Ovarian Cancer Early Detection Research Grant**. The Grant was awarded to PhD Researcher, Sophia George, of the University of Miami in Miami, Florida at the annual Society of Gynecological Oncologists (SGO) meeting in San Diego in March of this year. Dr. George's primary research focuses on the fallopian tubes as being a prime area where Ovarian Cancer may originate. We are very excited as to the possibilities this research may have toward the detection of Ovarian Cancer at its most treatable stage. It is through the generosity of all of you that we have been able to accomplish this most important goal! Can you imagine if this grant was the first to lead to a discovery of an early detection test for Ovarian Cancer and your contributions made the difference?!

From a continued research funding perspective, the winner of our 2016 "Making a Difference Award," Ramandeep Rattan, PhD, Henry Ford Hospital Ovarian Cancer Researcher, received a \$5,000 stipend toward her continued research. Over the last five years we have been able to contribute \$52,500 toward specific research efforts to a number of prominent research organizations across the U.S. including: MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX; National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD; University of Miami, Miami, FL; and Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit, MI.

Our two signature events, the 5th Annual Belinda Sue Fund Gala and the 5th Annual Belinda Sue Fund Zoo Walk were, again, very successful and greatly contributed to the other primary goal of increasing the public awareness of Ovarian Cancer. This year we raised over \$40,000 in net proceeds for the combined events! These events, along with our billboard campaign over the last five years, media interviews and other public service announcements, have allowed us to expand the public knowledge of the subtle symptoms of Ovarian Cancer, hopefully catching it at its most treatable stage.

Our Annual Gala saw nearly 200 guests attend the event for the fifth straight year. One of the highlights of the evening, in addition to the "Making a Difference Award," was the presentation of the Belinda Sue Fund "Teal Tribute

(See "Letter" pg. 3)

Zoo Walk Fun & Fellowship!

It was a gorgeous Fall day that served as the backdrop to our 5th Annual Zoo Walk on September 18th at the Detroit Zoo. With over 1000 people in attendance we had our most successful Walk yet!

Folks were treated to a morning of fun and fellowship, which included an enthusiastic fitness routine by Dena Raptis who returned for a 5th year to get the crowd warmed up to the upbeat music of DJ James Jayson. Cheryl Chodun, our loyal Mistress of Ceremonies, returned to welcome and engage the crowd while Tom Nantais and his daughter, Caroline Maykovich, offered some heartfelt words about the mission of The Belinda Sue Fund and the importance of awareness and research in finding a reliable screening tool for this deadly disease.

There were plenty of vendors on site selling their wares along with some very loyal sponsors and underwriters who all helped to make the Walk so incredibly successful. Attendees were able to enjoy perusing the various sponsor and vendor tables as they enjoyed bagels, fruit and coffee; while the children were able to get their faces painted or a henna tattoo.

After the official ribbon cutting to start the Walk, over 40 teams and several hundred individual walkers meandered through the back part of the Zoo on a 1-mile walk to see some very active animals frolicking in their habitats. Along the path walkers also enjoyed hearing music from Cranbrook School Student Musicians and Community Musicians. And everyone had the opportunity to get a group photo taken at the fountain before returning to the pavilion where raffle prizes were given away, along with recognition given to online fundraising efforts and the many teams who came out to walk in honor or memory of a loved one. To see all photos of the Zoo Walk go to www.belindasuefund.org/events.

Save the date for next year's Walk which will take place on **Sunday, September 17, 2017**. We hope to see you there!!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 **A Letter from the Chairman...**
- 1 **Zoo Walk Fun & Fellowship!**
- 2 **A Personal Message**
- 3 **Did You Know?**
- 3 **Make a Donation**
- 3 **Save-the-Date!!**

A Personal Message

Every issue we feature a special message or personal story of someone who has been affected by Ovarian Cancer either directly or indirectly. In this issue we highlight the story of Sharon Copacia, an Ovarian Cancer survivor.

Sharon Copacia, 56 years old, was diagnosed with Stage 4 Ovarian Cancer in January of 2015. Her journey began in November 2014 when she started experiencing flu-like symptoms. She was unable to eat, was vomiting, and constantly had the chills. The symptoms continued and she started losing weight, lost control of her bladder, and was becoming very weak. At that point Sharon realized that something was really wrong. In fact, she recalls saying to herself, "I think I'm dying."

Sharon met with her primary doctor, and when he saw how she looked he agreed that something wasn't right. She was referred to a gastroenterologist who ordered an MRI. He called and informed her that the MRI showed a 33cm tumor on her pelvis. He said he was very sorry and wished her well. Sharon realized that he didn't think she was going to survive. By the way, she saw him recently and said to him jokingly, "I bet you didn't think you would ever see me again." Soon after receiving the results, both her primary care physician and OB/GYN doctor called her at home to see how she was doing. Again, this reinforced the seriousness of her situation.

Next, Sharon and her husband met the "most amazing" GYN Oncology doctor. They talked about surgery and chemotherapy. She recalls asking him the hardest thing she's ever had to ask someone in her life, "How long do I have to live?" He gave her some survival facts, but said that they wouldn't go into all the scenarios. She realizes now that he didn't want to scare her. As they continued this journey together, his kindness, strength and faith kept her from falling apart. She has discovered that surviving Ovarian Cancer is based on the doctor's skills, the patient's attitude, support from family and friends, and God's will. Following surgery and her first round of chemotherapy, her oncologist said that is was a miracle she survived. So, don't give up too easily.

How does one process being told that you have cancer? She and her husband held each other and cried together. This "amazing man" that she married 28 years ago told her that he was there for her, that they were in this together, and that everything was going to be O.K. Their children's love, support, and positive attitudes were also vital to her survival. Sharon doesn't know why, but she knows she's been blessed in so many ways throughout this journey. She didn't experience any pain after her surgery and had minimal negative effects from chemotherapy, other than going bald and looking just like her bald brother. Sharon is grateful for the many wonderful people in her life that prayed for her, sent cards, made food, etc. Their love and prayers made her feel like happiness was pouring out of her every day.

Here are personal tips from Sharon on how she's been surviving cancer:

1) Take in information at your own pace so you don't get overwhelmed.

2) Have someone you don't know shave your head, get a pretty wig (even name your wigs like Sharon did!), and go out shopping.

3) Joke about cancer and make others laugh instead of cry. It helps take away the awkwardness when seeing family/friends for the first time.

(See "A Personal Message" next column)

"A Personal Message" (con't)

4) Make chemo treatment days into fun days. Sharon and her daughter picked a new place to eat after every chemo treatment.

5) Realize that "it is what it is" and you have no control of the outcome. You can choose to be happy or miserable. Sharon is on round three of chemo, but has survived almost two years now. She's glad she spent those years laughing every day.

6) Look around you and feel blessed because there is always someone suffering more than you are. There are people born with disabilities, people who have struggled their entire lives with disease or other afflictions, children dying that didn't even get a chance to experience life, people living in poverty, etc. Sharon feels that she is truly blessed and refuses to feel sorry for herself.

She always thought that being told, "You have cancer" would be the most devastating thing in the world. She has learned that it doesn't have to be. Sharon doesn't know how long her time on this Earth will be, but she can't worry about it. She hopes that her story will help others that are going through cancer. She says, **"Do not let cancer define who you are, but let it inspire you to live the remainder of your life to the fullest."**



Pictured Top (L-R): Chris Copacia (Sharon's son), Sharon, Cheryl Chodun and Tom Nantais at the 5th Annual Belinda Sue Fund Zoo Walk in September.

Pictured Bottom (L-R): Nicole Copacia (Sharon's daughter), Kara McAllister, Sharon, Chris, and Samantha Dougherty. Sharon received the prize for raising the most in on-line donations in advance of the Zoo Walk. She is truly an inspiration to anyone who knows her or who has read her story. The Belinda Sue Fund thanks Sharon for her support and sends her positive thoughts, hope, and peace as she continues on her journey.

"Letter" (con't from pg. 1)

Award" to Ms. Brenda Baron, who spent 18 years facilitating the Ovarian Cancer Survivors' Group at the Gilda's Club in Royal Oak, MI. Brenda retired earlier this year, and it was fitting that she received this award for her dedication to the cause! Thank you, Brenda!

Our Zoo Walk, gets bigger each year, with a new record attendance of well over 1,000 walkers, volunteers and vendors. With 40 teams walking for survivors, loved ones who have passed, or just walking in general support, it was truly a heart-warming event that, again, brought together a fellowship of supporters so focused on ending this wretched disease! We would also like to thank Cheryl Chodun, former reporter for Channel 7 Action News, for her role as the mistress of ceremonies for both the Zoo Walk and our Annual Gala over the last several years. Her dedication to our cause is truly amazing and we are all so very grateful for her time and expertise!

As we move into 2017, the continued focus of The Belinda Sue Fund will be on increasing the awareness of Ovarian Cancer through our signature events, billboards, media interviews and newsletters. We firmly believe these efforts are working, and that if we help save only one life, we have made a difference! We believe we have for sure done that thanks to your unrelenting support. In addition, we will continue to financially support the research efforts of Dr. George and **The Belinda Sue Fund / Mary-Jane Welker Ovarian Cancer Early Detection Research Grant** in an effort to accelerate the timetable for the development of an early-detection test for this horrible disease. We are also in the process of looking to expand our nationwide reach through the enhanced use of social media. In this day and age, the use of this portal is a must.....more to follow early next year!

It has been an incredible five years! We would have never imagined the outpouring of support we have received to date, and we are all making a difference toward **Awareness, Early Detection, and Providing Hope** for those afflicted by Ovarian Cancer. As the year winds down and the holidays approach, I would, again, like to thank you for your incredibly generous support of our compelling mission. As you think about your year-end charitable giving, please consider helping us continue our passion of funding early-detection Ovarian Cancer Research. By identifying this cancer at its earliest stage, women will have a fighting chance!

I would like to wish all of you a safe and joyous Holiday Season and a prosperous 2017. This time of year is one where we need to reflect upon the blessings we have, enjoy special times with our families, and recharge our batteries in this fast-paced life!

Remember, "Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take your breath away!" This is truly one of those moments!

Sincerely Yours,

*Tom Nantais
Chairman, The Belinda Sue Fund*

Did You Know?*

In the absence of a reliable early detection tool for Ovarian Cancer here are some things a woman can do to try and detect the disease early:

- See your healthcare provide for regular pelvic exams.
- Listen to your body. If you are experiencing symptoms such as bloating, abdominal pain, difficulty eating, or urinary changes lasting more than 2 weeks, see your healthcare professional.
- The CA-125 blood test can detect Ovarian Cancer, but it can also detect common conditions other than cancer. This test is more useful in women who are known to already have Ovarian Cancer as it is a good indicator if treatment is working.
- A transvaginal ultrasound looks at a woman's uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. It can detect a mass, but cannot tell if it is cancerous or benign.

**Facts taken from The American Cancer Society*

Make a Donation!

To make a tax-deductible donation, go to www.belindasuefund.org/donate or mail a check to The Belinda Sue Fund
PO Box 210159 Auburn Hills, MI 48321

PLEASE NOTE: You have the option of making a one-time or recurring donation!

Save-the-Date!!

6th Annual Gala
April 8, 2017

Invitations and on-line registration coming in late February

6th Annual Zoo Walk
September 17, 2017

On-line registration to open in July